



# The Promise of a Better Life

A persistent belief in the promise of a better life ties together the stories of Delaware’s First State National Monument. People who were separated over 300 years by time and circumstance shared both the dedication and the determination to take action to improve life for themselves and on behalf of others.

The New World offered 17th-century Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, English and European settlers a fresh start and economic opportunities and they were willing to fight for them. Welcomed by the colony’s proprietor, William Penn, members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) sought refuge and the freedom to practice their religion in peace and, unusual among the colonies, it was a right they freely extended to others. Quaker settlement patterns are preserved at Woodlawn, and houses of worship stand as evidence of early settlers’ principles for free practice of religion, not only for themselves but for others.

Delaware was a place of revolution, with citizens agitating for their rights of political independence and self-determination. Delaware’s delegation to the Second Continental Congress played a key role in the summer of 1776 when Caesar Rodney rode overnight from Dover to Philadelphia to cast the vote that made unanimous the Declaration of Independence.

Eleven years after the United States declared its independence from Great Britain, Delaware became the first state to ratify the United States Constitution and endorse the nation’s principles for a more perfect union.

Abolitionists Thomas Garrett and John Hunn, guided by their Quaker faith, believed in the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. They became active figures on the Underground Railroad and, in the decades before the Civil War, helped enslaved people emancipate themselves to lives of freedom. Their dedication came with a price. Both were tried at the New Castle Court House in 1848 for their actions, found guilty, and punished with crippling fines. Garrett, a prosperous businessman, remained unrepentant and continued his anti-slavery activism with donations from others.

At the turn of the 20th century and in the wake of growing urbanization, businessman and philanthropist William Bancroft channeled his passion and his fortune into improving life for urban working people. With an eye toward posterity and the common good, Bancroft was a pioneer in conservation and an advocate for community planning, affordable housing, and urban open space to restore the soul.

Today, Woodlawn continues to help people connect to nature. It is evidence of Bancroft’s foresight and stewardship and continues the legacy of people in Delaware who acted on principle to improve the lives for others.



*“Even now in all the built up portions of the town, we have not a single Public Square, not a place where the mothers with their children, or the aged people can stroll, away from the noise of the dust of the City, without being trespassers.”*

This civic call for a public park adjacent to Brandywine Creek is from a July 1869 report to the Wilmington City Council. William Bancroft established Woodlawn Company in 1901 to preserve open space along the Brandywine and improve the quality of life for all citizens.





# First State, Lasting Impacts

## The Experience

Delaware's small size belies its influence in events that shaped the nation. The "First State" to ratify the United States Constitution, Delaware also played key roles in early colonization and European settlement, religious freedom, the Declaration of Independence, the Underground Railroad, school desegregation, and pioneering efforts in conservation and open space.

The First State National Monument boundary encompasses approximately 1,000 acres of federal, state, and city lands in Kent and New Castle Counties in Delaware. Programming and visitor services are provided by a number of partners with the National Park Service.

## Dover Green

The Green is the heart of Dover's historic district. Laid out in 1717 as the city of Dover's central square, The Green is where the Delaware legislature met in 1787 to become the first state to ratify the US Constitution. The tavern where they met is gone but The Green continued to play an important role in civic life as a place to gather, rally, review troops, and hold patriotic events. The Delaware Supreme Court and the Kent County Courthouse are adjacent to The Green.

## New Castle Court House

The court house was the first capital of the state and its State House (1776-1777). In June, 1776, it is where both the state of Delaware was created when it separated from Pennsylvania and the legislature acted to become independent from Great Britain. In 1848, the principles of the Declaration of Independence were put to the test when abolitionists Thomas Garrett and John Hunn were tried here, found guilty, and fined for helping enslaved people emancipate themselves.

**Sheriff's House (New Castle)** Built in 1858, the Victorian brownstone building which sits behind the Court House served as the home of the sheriff and as the administrative site for the attached prison. The sheriff's house and the adjoining New Castle Court House were the center of New Castle County's justice system and are all that remain of the first county prison in Delaware.

## New Castle Green

The Green is the center of New Castle's government and business district. It is surrounded by historic buildings dating to the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. In addition to the court house and Sheriff's House, the federal arsenal and academy buildings (1809 and 1789, respectively), and Immanuel Episcopal Church (1689) surround the Green.

## Woodlawn

Woodlawn contains the "12-mile arc," the circular demarcation line drawn from the New Castle Court House to establish the boundary between Pennsylvania and Delaware in the 17th century. The property contains original Quaker settlement patterns and homes of some of the first Quakers to settle the area with William Penn. Today, Woodlawn offers open space, trails, and more than 1,100 acres of woods and pastures in the Brandywine Valley including the Ramsey Farm, Upland Forest, scenic rock outcrops, and wetlands along the Brandywine River.



Celebrating Dover Days, City of Dover  
Interior of New Castle Court House, Courtesy of Stephanie Lee Shaw  
Exploring Rockford, Woodlawn Fund, Inc.,  
1738 map showing pre-Delaware borders, Library of Congress



## Planning Your Visit

### A New National Park

First State National Monument is a new national park with services offered by partners with the National Park Service.

### For a Safe Visit

Be aware that land within the national monument is a mix of federal, state, and city land. Be careful crossing streets. Lock all valuables out of sight in your car.

### Getting to the First State National Monument

Directions to our partners at :

#### Dover Green, Dover

*From New York, Philadelphia and north:* From I-95 S: Merge onto I-495 S via Exit 11 (toward Port of Wilmington/Baltimore). Merge onto US-13 S via Exit 1 (toward US-40/Dover/Wilmington). Merge onto SR-1 S. Take exit 98 for SR-8 (toward Downtown Dover/Little Creek). Turn right onto N Little Creek Road (SR-8). Turn left onto S State Street.

*From Washington and west:* Take US-50 E; Take US-301 N toward Wilmington. Turn right onto MD-302/Barclay Rd. MD-302/Barclay Road becomes Arthursville Rd/SR-11. Turn right onto SR-44/Main Street. Turn left onto SR-8/Halltown Rd. Turn right onto S State Street.  
GPS: The Green, Dover, DE 19901 Latitude and Longitude: 39.1563, -75.5237

#### New Castle Court House Museum, New Castle

*From New York and north:* From I-95 S, merge onto I-495 S via exit 11 (toward Port of

Wilmington/Baltimore). Take exit 2, Terminal Avenue (SR-9A/Port of Wilmington). Right onto Terminal Avenue. Left onto New Castle Ave/SR-9 S. Left onto Delaware Street.

*From Washington and south:* US-50 E; Take the Baltimore-Washington Parkway exit (on left) toward Baltimore. Merge onto MD-295 N. Merge onto I-895 N/Harbor Tunnel Throughway. I-895 N/Harbor Tunnel Throughway becomes I-95 N. Merge onto SR-273 E via exit 3A (toward Dover). Turn slight right onto Delaware Street.  
GPS: 211 Delaware Street New Castle, DE 19720  
Latitude/Longitude: 39.6600, -75.5636

#### Woodlawn, near Wilmington:

*Directions to Delaware's Brandywine Creek State Park, adjacent to Woodlawn:* From I-95, take exit 8B (US-202 N/Concord Pike toward Wilmington). Keep left at fork; follow signs for Delaware 141 S and merge onto US-202 N/Concord Pike. Left onto Powder Mill Road, continue onto Children's Drive. Right onto Rockland Road. Slight right onto Adams Dam Road.  
GPS: 47 Adams Dam Rd Wilmington, DE 19807  
Latitude/Longitude: 39.8000, -75.5813

#### More Information

First State National Monument  
National Park Service  
c/o New Castle Court House Museum  
211 Delaware Street  
New Castle, DE 19720  
(302) 824-3530  
[www.nps.gov/frst](http://www.nps.gov/frst)

First State National Monument is one of the newest of more than 400 parks in the National Park System. With First State, Delaware has its first national park and there are now national parks in all 50 states. Learn more about the parks and how the National Park Service strengthens American communities: [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) .

